



File Photos

Osage County's busiest thoroughway, U.S. 75, has changed along with the county through the years. After the founding of the county's cities, it quickly became one of the most important north-south routes in the area. At left, workers pose for a picture with crossing traffic after completing a bridge across Salt Creek south of Lyndon in the late 1800s. At the time, the road was primarily composed of dirt and sand. The road was paved from north to south during the early 1900s, with improvements through the years. In the last few decades, improvements were made to bring most of the highway to "super two" status, with wide shoulders, some controlled access and higher speeds, with the north section becoming a four-lane controlled access freeway. Improvements have been scheduled this year to replace the old railroad bridge north of Lyndon, right, upgrading the underpass area to a super two with a walkway for the trail passing over the highway. Plans for the walkway, which will be completed with stimulus funds, appear above.



Rails to Roads

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The advancement of highways continued with U.S. 75 south from Lyndon to Burlington, completed in 1939. By 1950, all of the cities were serviced by paved highways.

During that time, the number of cars on the roads had increased dramatically. Most county highways saw between 500 and 800 vehicles a day, with traffic on U.S. 56 North, one of the main routes to Kansas City. The busiest section of road continued to be the road north from U.S. 50 North and Carbondale to Topeka along U.S. 75, which saw around 2,750 vehicles a day.

Traffic along state highways decreased later that decade, as the Kansas Turnpike and Eisenhower Interstate System were announced.

Work on the turnpike began in 1954 and was completed in 1956. A 10-mile section of the route clipped the county along the northwest section, but was only

accessible by U.S. 50 North west of the county line. The interchange, still in place today, was one of the original stops along the turnpike.

The year the turnpike was completed, congress approved the interstate system, a multi-lane, controlled access network of roads based on the German Autobahn, as witnessed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower during World War II.

Interstate 35 was to be one of the country's main north-south highways, stretching from Duluth, Minn., to Laredo, Texas. Around 11 of the 1,536 miles of I-35 pass through Osage County, with access across the county line at BETO Junction (Burlington-Emporia-Topeka-Ottawa), where it crosses U.S. 75. Today, the section of I-35 which crosses the county sees more than 11,000 vehicles daily.

Through the dawn of the interstate system, cities in Osage County continued paving streets, but much of the county roads remained gravel until Federal Aid Sys-

tem (FAS) provided funds to help pave county roads in the 1960s and 1970s. During the next two decades, many paved county roads were first laid. When combined with the highways, Osage County had around 200 miles of paved all-weather roads outside of its eight cities.

"We really haven't paved any new roads since the 80s," said Glynn Tyson, Osage County road and bridge supervisor.

Tyson's department oversees 84 miles of paved roads, 162 miles of gravel roads, 55 rural system bridges and another 182 off-system bridges. Maintaining roads and bridges remains most of the departments' job, with plans for replacing older bridges filling the county's workload, and budget, for years to come.

"We're working on bridge plans that won't be done until 2013," Tyson said. "We're generally about five years out."

The department and county continue to see changes, with more requests for new paved roads as the population continues to move into rural ar-

reas, along with FAS routes which lead out of the cities for a couple of miles before turning to gravel.

"There's a lot of roads that need to be improved," Tyson said.

The department could also see a big change with the possible transition from township maintenance to county maintenance as commissioners consider taking over township roads.

"A county unit system would change a lot of things," Tyson said.

The highways have also changed over the past 40 years, with major upgrades to U.S. 75, which runs as a "super two" with full shoulders through 75 percent of the county with controlled access in several areas. The northern section of U.S. 75, the seven miles from U.S. 56 to the county line, run as a controlled-access freeway serving more than 10,000 vehicles a day.

U.S. 75 remains first in line for improvements, recently allotted nearly \$2 million for a walkway to replace an obsolete rail bridge north of Lyndon. The bridge, when completed, will clear the way for oversized trucks to move

through the county while preserving passage along the Flint Hills Trail.

Additional projects ranging from shoulder improvements on U.S. 56 and K-31, to a Lyndon bypass, remain on the drawing table, lacking funds and support.

Present day transportation

All three modes of transportation still play a major role in Osage County. State highways run through each of the county's eight incorporated communities, in addition to serving the two federal reservoirs.

Burlingame alone retains representation from the trail, rail and roads. The Santa Fe Trail is memorialized in the location and namesake of the city's east-west thoroughfare; the BNSF runs along the east edge of town; and highways K-31 and U.S. 56 meet, and split in the center of the city, heading east and west, respectively and jointly to the south.

K-31 runs east to west through the center of Osage City, meeting up with K-170, which runs north and south on the city's western edge. The city is still bi-

sected by the BNSF railroad, which runs south from Burlingame to Emporia, passing the historical Santa Fe Depot in downtown.

The BNSF begins in the north end of the county, running south through Carbondale, which lies just west of U.S. 75, and on to Scranton. Scranton sits directly on U.S. 56, with continues east through Overbrook, which no longer has the rails that first spurred the city's growth.

In the southern part county, the BNSF routes runs south of the lakes, passing through Olivet, Melvern and Quenemo. Olivet is spurred by K-276; Melvern is serviced by K-31, and Quenemo by U.S. 68. Short spurs of state highways also service the state and federal parks around Lake Pomona and Lake Melvern.

Among the last to be served by the railroad, Lyndon, in the center of the county, is closely served by most of the county's main highways. The city sees the increased traffic of the combined U.S. 75 and K-31 routes, with a K-31/268 junction one mile to the north, and the western end of U.S. 68 to the south.



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